

United States Army School Of Music
~Information for New Soldiers & Their Spouses ~

WELCOME:

Welcome to the Army School of Music @ Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base in Norfolk, VA. I am sure you are happy that your spouse has finished BCT and are ready for more of a “normal” life. Don’t hold your breath for normal but this can be a real adventure and I hope that through the ups and downs you embrace this experience and the responsibilities you have been given. Being a spouse of an American Soldier ****IS**** the toughest job in the Army but one you can take a great sense of pride in.

PURPOSE:

I am a spouse of a student who relocated here and found at times that I was struggling to get information because I didn’t know the right questions to ask. I kept saying to my husband “we can’t be the first ones to have gone through this, I wish there was some handout that could help us and give us direction”. I could not find one, so I sat down and wrote out things I wish I had known. That list is now this document. I don’t make any promises about its accuracy because things with the military are always changing, but I hope that it will empower you with SOME direction and understanding and will help you with asking the right questions and provide you with some important phone numbers. I have done my best to organize things in some sort of order but at times I can be random ☺. My biggest hope with this however, is that it will enable you to understand a bit more about this time in training and will equip you to “take care of business”, something you will have to get use to doing throughout your soldiers career. While your service member is the one wearing the uniform, I assure you that both of you are serving your country. You can either look at it as a burden or an honor. I chose to look at it as an honor and I hope you do as well.

SIDENOTE:

Before I go on, you may find me referring to your husband and I mean that generically as there are some active duty females whose husbands move with them, however there are more men which means more women spouses. Depending on the situation, “you” may at times refer to your soldier as in “you need to ask the Drill Sgt. about that” and sometimes it means the spouse. I didn’t major in English in college so forgive my imperfections ☺

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ORDERS:

First and foremost, do the orders say “Permanent Change of Station” and do they “authorize bringing dependants”? Without those words in the orders coming out here will be on your own (translation, you pay for it). If you are not sure, ask the Drill Sgt. about what your orders say.

SIDENOTE:

As soon as your soldier has his orders get a copy and keep it with you as you work on getting settled, you will need them for most things in the beginning. Also, make sure you have your military ID card, that you have military decals on your vehicle, that you have signed up for Tricare, the military health plan and dental (dental is a separate form and costs a few bucks a month). You NEED to do these ASAP. The ID card and vehicle decals become your “ticket” onto base. Without these you can’t do much.

Second, assuming the family can move here (which is the assumption I am making as many things are dependant on that fact) you need to decide if it is best for your family to be here (keep in mind your soldier could be here about 6 months). By that I mean do you have kids in school? Is it worth it for your spouse to leave their job? Where will you be stationed after training? Will the family being here negatively impact the work your soldier needs to do? This is a family decision and one that you need to make together considering the pro’s and con’s. Assuming you will be coming out here consider putting most of your belongings in storage. Because of the structure of training, you will be spending a great deal of time on base (Navy has bases, Army has Posts, Little Creek is a base...just FYI) and little time in your apartment. We brought about 30% of our stuff and hardly use half of it. This is also a great time to “Spring Clean”.

MOVING:

So assuming now that you are moving out here you gotta figure out how. Like I said before, consider putting most of your stuff in storage. Of the things you are going to bring you essentially have 2 choices on how to get it out here. Do it yourself (aka DITY move) or have professional movers move it. If you don’t have much and you have some family members/friends who can help you I recommend you do it yourself. With the orders in hand and an inventory of what you are bringing you can go to any the

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Transportation office and get an advance. If you have already moved (like we did) you can get a reimbursement at Ft. Story Transportation office (I will list all the numbers at the end of this document). Transportation can also set up the movers to come but that will take far more coordination and you are subject to their schedule. I highly recommend a DITY move if at all possible.

SIDENOTE:

You will be eligible for travel expenses so keep your receipts of moving supplies, hotels and gas (including the gas of anyone who helped you move).

HOUSING:

Now that you are coming out here, where are you going to live? First and foremost, there is “this side of the water” referring to the Norfolk side, and there is “the other side of the water” which refers to the Hampton side. STAY on the Norfolk side. There is a bottleneck in traffic called the “Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel” (I-64) which has HORRID traffic. The drive is beautiful and there is much to do on “the other side” but let me urge you from personal experience and annoyance STAY ON THE NORFOLK SIDE. Now that does not mean you must live in Norfolk because that is not the nicest area, but when you look on the map stay on that side of the water and avoid having to go through any tunnel to get to base (there is also the downtown tunnel on I-264 and another one on I-664). If you want to ever check on traffic you can look on www.VA511.com.

There is a program called RPP, Rental Partnership Program, where apartment managements work with military personnel to get into an apartment easier. I won't go into all the details about this because there are so many but if you are interested in it you need to go to the Norfolk MAIN base housing office which is located on Hampton Rd. It is part of the main base but it is technically located off base next to the Navy Federal Credit Union main office. From Little Creek turn right on Shore drive, left on Little Creek Rd, take it about 8 miles and it “T’s” into Hampton, turn right, and it is on your left about a mile or so up (you will pass the Norfolk Navy Lodge there on the left as well).

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SIDENOTE:

Wherever you end up renting be sure that your lease has a military clause that allows you to break your lease with orders to another post. They usually require 30 days notice and it usually has to be given on the 1st of the month. Also, when looking for apartments most that are located on or near Little Creek Rd are not in the best area (but the pictures in the book look nice). Ask the Drill Sgt. about a particular apartment before you sign the lease.

One more thing, the military will pay up to 10 days of temporary housing (i.e. hotel up to a specific amount) while you look for housing. Consider staying at Shields Hall across the street from the school, it's cheap, close by, and for the price it is decent.

USASOM (United States Army School of Music):

As you probably have figured out, the military has a language all its own. Hopefully this will help you figure out some of what the lingo is so you don't feel lost in conversations.

- STUCO: This stands for Student Company and also references the office where the Drill Sergeants are located at. It is across the back parking lot of the barracks and your soldier will go there for most things. Find out where this is located at.
- X-Div: When there are not enough students to class up (25 are needed for a class and there will be students from the Navy and the Marines there as well) your soldier will be placed in X-Div. This is a holding area so to speak and basically they spend all day doing odd jobs around the school. Just remember, they are still getting paid so it's not THAT bad!
- **Phases:** You probably remember Red, White, and Blue phase during Basic, here they are 4, 5 & 5+ (don't ask why it's not 6). Phase 4 is weapons immersion and it lasts 4 weeks. This is the most restrictive as your soldier is responsible for a weapon and not to diminish the responsibility but basically they have to baby-sit it for the 4 weeks with few exceptions and lots of restrictions. If you are here during phase 4 don't expect being able to do much with your soldier. They can share more with you about their specific limitations and directions from the Drill Sgt. Phase 5 your soldier is allowed off base but is subject to curfew every night and is limited on how far they can travel. They are allowed to wear civilian clothes. Your soldier can



put in for weekend passes at this time but do not abuse this. They are still in training and that is what they are being paid to do. Yes it is a pain but you will get through it. Phase 5+, this is where your soldier can ask to move off base. This is no guarantee and they must pass their F1 (I will explain that in a minute) before this can happen. To give you a time frame, 5+ can happen somewhere around month 3 but there are variables that can extend that.

- F1, F2, FTX: F1 is essentially a mid-term exam. By exam I mean that your soldier will be evaluated on various music things. I am not a music person so even though my husband explained things over and over I still don't get it all. The thing to know is that it is a mid-term and passing it will allow your soldier to ask for 5+ meaning they can move off base. Need I say more? F2 is the final exam. This is what frees you to leave and eventually report to your first duty station. After the F2 however, your soldier will have to go on an FTX which is a Field Training Exercise. I call it "Rambo Camping" for a week, that was the best way I could understand it ☺.
- Saturday training: Usually once a month on a Saturday there is training that starts about 6 AM and goes until around 9 AM. On these training days the soldier can not get a pass for the weekend.
- Practice hours: Your soldier is here for training, part of that training requires practice hours. Depending on your soldier's instructor they will have a set number of hours to practice including weekend hours. Unless you have a weekend pass you are not exempt from these hours even during 5+ so just accept them as part of your schedules.
- Duty: Your soldier will be required to have duty hours either at the school or at the barracks. Some shifts are nice, some are annoying. Be aware of their need to sleep if they have the really late/early shift.
- Speaking of barracks: Few points on the barracks, you can not go into them, the cell phone signal is really bad so don't be surprised if you get cut off a million times or that they never hear the phone ring, there are bed checks every night and when they say curfew is at 9:30 PM, they mean 9:30 PM. The barracks are inspected on a regular basis. I highly, and I mean highly, recommend that your soldier get really good at being squared away in the barracks. The Drill Sgt. is trained to find even the smallest thing wrong. Encourage your soldier to get their stuff squared away before you talk for the evening. This will save you both much heartache.

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- Field night/extra classes: Every Tuesday night your soldier will have “field night” either at the barracks or at the school. At first I thought this was like a field trip, but it’s not, it’s cleaning and maintenance of the buildings. It alternates between the school and the barracks. They are usually done around 7 PM (1900 hrs). Additional classes are required during the week and your soldier will not know if there is one until the 0700 formation on that day. They are usually held on M/Th @ 1600. Be flexible as he will not have control over these things.
- General Mess: The name for the “dining hall”. You can eat with your soldier if you want, breakfast is about \$2, lunch and dinner are under \$5, bring cash and keep it to bills under \$10 as they don’t always have change, especially at breakfast. There are a few things that are good there but never forget they are cooking for the masses and it is not the best for you. My husband lost 4 lbs the first month he stopped eating there. Oh, and if you want a nice leisurely breakfast or lunch, this is not the place because your soldier is pressed for time.
- DMod: This is the “front desk” of the barracks. If you drive up to the circular driveway at the barracks and you see the waiting room place, that is DMod which is also where your soldier will have duty when he has duty at the barracks.
- Library/Computers: The library is in the pretty new building just on the other side of STUCO and they have computers there for you to use as long as you have a military ID. If you have a lap top Shields Hall has wireless that most of the time works but when it’s not working, it’s not working!
- Stress: Your soldier has gone from being outside and moving all day long releasing stress (running, climbing things, etc) to being in a classroom/practice room environment for most of the day. This, coupled with the stress of his family being here but not being allowed to live at home, can really “get” to your soldier. This stress is NORMAL. Few things I recommend. One, talk with one of the Chaplains. They are not going to “push religion down your throat”, they understand the training environment in a way the families cannot and are a neutral person to vent to in private. Second, make sure your soldier gets out and does something physical besides PT in the morning. Take a walk together, go to the gym together, do something that does not place them within 4 dreary walls.

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- There is a movie theater on base that has movies that have been out for a month or so and it's a whopping \$1 per person. Not bad a month old flick! The theater is across the street from the school.
-  ▪ If you have visitors and they want to stay on base there is a Navy Lodge not far from the school (just down Gator Blvd, pass the small NEX). Rates run around \$60 per night but it changes with the tourist season. Keep in mind the soldier is responsible for the guests that stay at the Navy Lodge and reservations fill up fast so call ASAP. If you need a room for the same day, call the lodge directly.
- NEX: This is the Navy Exchange, kinda like a Target on base, has most things you need. There is also a Commissary, funny name for a grocery store. It is located beside the NEX. There is also a place to get discounted tickets to local attractions called ITT. These are all located near Gate 5.
-  ▪ Gate 4 is the easiest gate to enter to get to the school and the barracks. They are usually open from 5 AM to 8 PM during the weekdays, not sure about the weekend but they usually close that gate at dusk. At the time I am writing this Gate 3 is open 24hrs but they are about to open the new and improved Gate 5 so that may become the 24hr gate. The gates are all along Shore Dr. and one of them will be open at all times unless the threat condition or Force Protection Condition changes (ThreatCon or FPCon, respectively). The gym is located on Gator Blvd just up from Gate 4. Most things are close by the school so you won't be traveling very far to get anywhere.
- There is a post office on base but it is far from the school. It is on the street that runs parallel to Shore Dr. (Amphibious Dr.) on base towards the ships, just over the bridge on the right. Take a left after entering Gate 3, but be careful, it comes up on you quick!

I want to reiterate something here. Your soldier is a soldier 24/7. Especially in this training environment his time is not his own. Formation can be called at anytime, extra duty can be assigned at anytime, he can "get in trouble" because of what others have done. That is part of the team he now belongs to and part of the soldierization process. You don't have to like or agree with all that goes on, more than likely you will not. What you can like and agree with is the role you have in supporting your soldier through this experience. It will be tough on both of you in very different ways. You will have more

freedom to do things and take care of things than he will. That freedom comes with responsibilities. Support your soldier, be understanding, be flexible and encouraging. Your positive attitude and support will mean more to your soldier than he will ever be able to express. The flip side is that if you are unsupportive and have a negative attitude about everything you are really setting your soldier up for failure. Training is tough enough with enough pressures of its own, don't contribute to that pressure. This will all be over soon enough!

OTHER STUFF:

Here is just a list of random stuff that we have learned. I will say this, I am "endorsing" some things out of my personal experience not that anyone encouraged me to (how is that for a disclaimer?)

- Get a Primary Care Manager (PCM aka doctor) as soon as possible and go see them so you are in their system should you really become sick and need to see them urgently! This area has SO MANY military dependants here and not all doctors accept Tricare, that it may take a month to get an appointment. It is a pain I assure you but that is what we have to deal with. If however, before that appointment you need to see a doctor GO (don't call) to Boone which is the clinic on base located at Gate 4.
- I recommend getting a mailbox at a UPS store (www.theupsstore.com we have one). There is one on Shore Dr., one on Independence, one on Military and I am sure others as well. You can rent a box from them before you move (via fax and credit card) and you will have an address you can forward your mail to before you leave. Otherwise you can end up with a 2-3 week delay in mail. Another plus is they will accept packages for you (i.e. from UPS or FedEx) that require a physical address and you don't have to wait around or miss a package being delivered. Considering the few months you will be here it will be well worth it.
- Banking & insurance: I ****HIGHLY**** recommend becoming a member of USAA. They have services such as banking, insurance, and car buying programs just to name a few but having been with them for almost 8 years I can tell you they will go out of their way to help a service member and their family. Since your soldier is coming is as an E-4 you are qualified (last I checked) to be a member. They have

been by far incredible in everything we have needed. They were started by Army officers and are military focused. They understand first hand the unique needs you will face and provide service far above your expectations. Be sure to get renters insurance as well. It's a few dollars a month and with all the moves you will be doing and stuff in storage etc it is WELL WORTH IT! Their website is

www.usaa.com

- Norfolk Airport is not the most travel friendly airport. When you travel in/out of there do not expect the conveniences of larger airports. Their website is www.takeorf.com (yes it is Take ORF...ORF is the airport's code like LAX is Los Angeles)
- From Memorial Day to Labor Day the VA Beach area has LOTS of tourists which means traffic is bad, especially in the tunnels.
- Hurricanes happen up here but they are not as bad as the Gulf. The time when they hit this area is usually Aug-Oct. If you are here during that time have a plan in mind with your soldier on what to do should the area be evacuated. Be sure to ask the Drill Sgt. about policies and what they expect of you etc.
- The summers here are humid, there is a very high tax on prepared foods (i.e. anything from McDonalds to high end restaurants have an almost 11% sales tax), VA is a smoke state so if you don't like smoke in restaurants you either hold your breath or you eat on the patio. You will see lots of people have a sticker on their car that says "OBX", it stands for the Outer Banks in North Carolina, it's a popular vacation spot. Took me a couple of weeks to figure out what that was, random I know but you will see every other car has the sticker!
- If you are looking for some of the **happening places** around they are on VA Beach Blvd. From Gate 4 make a left on Shore Dr., at the light is Independence, make a right and take it down about 6 miles. Turn left on VA Beach Blvd. The Pembroke Mall is there, restaurants such as PF Chang's, Cheesecake Factory, and Gordon Biersch, Strabucks, Bath & Body, movie theater, and lots more!
- **If there is an emergency and you need to get hold of your soldier** (I mean a real emergency, not wanting to know if he wants you to bring dinner tonight) do not hesitate on calling STUCO, the school, or DMod. Someone will know where your soldier is and if there is a serious emergency the Drill Sgt needs to know about it. They will be an incredible asset in getting things done; they have been in the military

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for years and know the ins and outs. When we had a medical emergency they were awesome. One more note about the Drill Sgt., they are not the same as the ones at Basic so do not be scared of them. Respect them, their authority, and the responsibility they have been given. They are here to help your soldier during this phase of training. If you have a problem, are considering an apartment or buying a car (be VERY leery of car sales places around here, they are hungry for military dollars and can steal your money if you are not careful) talk with the Drill Sgt.

Important Phone Numbers:

STUCO	757- 462-7242
School	757- 462-7773
Shields Hall	757- 318-5425
USAA	800-531-2265 or 800-531-8111
Navy Lodge- General number	800-628-9466
Navy Lodge- Little Creek	757-464-6215
Navy Lodge – Norfolk (not anywhere as nice as Little Creek)	757-489-2656
Transportation (located at Ft. Story, about 10 miles down on Shore Drive, once on post they are next to the HQ building)	757-422-7722
Tricare Main	877-874-2273 (877-TRI-CARE)
Tricare (appointment line)	866-645-4584 (866-MIL-HLTH)
DEERS	800-538-9552
DFAS (for travel reimbursements/ advances)	888-332-7366
Chapel	757-462-7427
Movie Theater (Little Creek and Main)	757-462-7534 or 757-440-1500
United Concordia- Dental	800-866-8499
Navy Housing (RPP Program)	757-445-2832 or 800-628-7510
UPS Stores	757-460-2753 or 757-460-7460 or 757-466-8666

Notes: _____

